

*Inspiring Figuratives
for Artists*



*Sixty-Five Photographs
by Alexander Grinberg*

Volume Three

Inspiring Figuratives for Artists: Volume Three

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If you wish to sit for figurative photography here in Vancouver, or may want to submit your own figurative photographs, feel free to contact the editor of *Inspiring Figuratives for Artists* at

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Inspiring Figuratives for Artist series

The purpose of the *Inspiring Figurative for Artists* series is to provide study materials for the artistic praxis of artists who are trying to master the human form.

Inspiring Figuratives for Artists is a series of books to help you with your *Figurative* artistic praxis. If you master the *Figurative* ... it is said you can master art.

In each *Figurative* in this book search for vanishing points, as well as form and function.

This book features a carefully selected group of *Figurative* photography by the Soviet era Russian photographer Alexander Grinberg.

This book is the third in the *Inspiring Figuratives for Artists* series for artists wanting to expand their artistic praxis brought to you by *Atelier Press*.

Vancouver, 2024

Alexander Grinberg (1885-1979).

Alexander Grinberg (1885-1979) was a Russian Portraiture, Figurative and Pictorial photographer.



He started his Pictorial photography when he was ten years old. In 1895 photography was very much in its infancy. Later, from his twenties onwards his main interest would turn towards Figurative photography.

I first heard about Alexander Grinberg from two Russian expatriate artists here in Vancouver about a decade ago. Both of the artists are sculptors who went to school in Moscow during those few years that spanned the end of the Soviet era and the beginning of the post-Soviet era in Moscow. One of

the artists is female while the other is male. He grew up in Moscow and she in the Far East, winning a state scholarship to art school in far off Moscow.

They both knew details of his life and gave me a different narrative as far as Grinberg's *Figurative* work was concerned. The woman found his work to be lyrical and delightful, while the man described his photography as being obscene and pornographic. The woman spoke in terms of artistic beauty, while he was political.

Grinberg suffered because under Stalinist Cultural policy the *Soviet State* deemed all erotic works as being counter to the public good – the *Soviet Apparatchik* had deemed Grinberg's work as being pornographic.

As the Russian woman explained,

“... far from being revolutionary in its art, Soviet Society was very Victorian when it came to Figuratives. The Soviet's designation of Grinberg's photography as being degenerate meant they sought to destroy both him and his art.”

In 1906 at age 21, Grinberg joined the Russian Photographic Organization (RFO), the foremost experimental photographic union in Russia at the time. This was a pre-Soviet Organization. As a member of the RFO Grinberg, developed his artistic praxis as he explored pictorial photography. He did landscapes, portraiture, theatrical photography as well as Figuratives. He also took up an interest in film-making.

In 1908, at the young age of 23, Grinberg was awarded a silver medal for his pictorial photographs at the All-Russian photography exhibition in Moscow, and a gold medal at the international photo-exhibition for his portraiture submission in Dresden. Some of the pieces shown in Dresden included some of his earliest Figuratives. It was fine to show portraits but it problematic to show Figuratives in Moscow even during the era of the Tsar.

After World War I he worked for the Biofilm studio. Grinberg was interested in Russian experimental and film culture. In the 1920s he became an instructor at the State Technical Institute of Cinematography. It was here that he began his association with Sergei Eisenstein and worked with him on several popular films *Potomok Araba* (1926) and *Dva Druga — Model' i Podruga* (1927).

Being free artists, the RFO was forcibly disbanded by the Stalinist State in 1928 after accusations of “representing an old-world aesthetic that clashed with the rise of proletarian realism and photojournalism and photomontage.”

Bravely Grinsberg continued on his own his exploration of portraiture, publicly stating that “my main focus was scientific work on new methods of photographic portraits.”

His independence brought him to the attention of the *Soviet Apparatchik*. Grinberg was further ostracized by Stalinist policy dictating any eroticism in art as a remnant of bourgeois idleness.

Despite the risk, Grinberg showed one more exhibition of his artwork in 1935, skirting the policy and displaying images of partially dressed women.



His *Figuratives* raised a storm of controversy from the *Soviet Apparatchik*. Within days Grinberg was arrested and sentenced to an indefinite incarceration in a Siberian labor camp.

In a courageous act of brotherly love, his brother risked arrest and incarceration in a Siberian labour camp when he gathered up and hid Alexander's negatives from the authorities, leaving behind some of his lesser works.

Grinberg spent nearly four years in a Siberian forced labor camp cutting down trees and making furniture. He was released on early parole for his artistry and good behavior in 1939.

Upon his return to Moscow he took up an almost bohemian life style and enjoyed where ever possible the city's night life, his artistic reputation opening doors for him, several of his artist models keeping him warm at night

In short order Grinberg resumed his work as a photographer for a variety of institutions. He once again took up Figuratives but did not show them outside his small circle of family and friends.

Beginning in 1941, Alexander Grinberg worked as a photographer and photojournalist, sometimes very near the front on several occasions. Some of his photographs would be published in Soviet newspapers.

After World War Two, Grinberg worked for a modeling agency, photographing for fashion designers. In the late 1950's, and throughout the 1960's he made portraits of various famous Soviet actors and scientists.

Grinberg died in 1979 largely unknown as a photographer within the Soviet Union.

It was only a decade after his death when his Figurative photographs were rediscovered outside the Soviet Union and put on show at some retrospectives in Europe that Grinberg started to become known as a fine Figurative Photographer.

Each few years a new set of Grinberg negatives or prints surface for auction. They have become collectibles.

Alexander Grinberg's photography spans an interesting era of Figurative art. It spans the end of the Victorian era and the beginnings of Art Deco. By it was produced with a Russian sensibility, which is something that makes his work charming and unique. The Grinberg Figuratives in this book spans four decades, 1920 to 1960, and several genres.



“... my main focus was scientific work on new methods of photographic portraits.”

Alexander Grinberg

Figuratives by Grinberg





























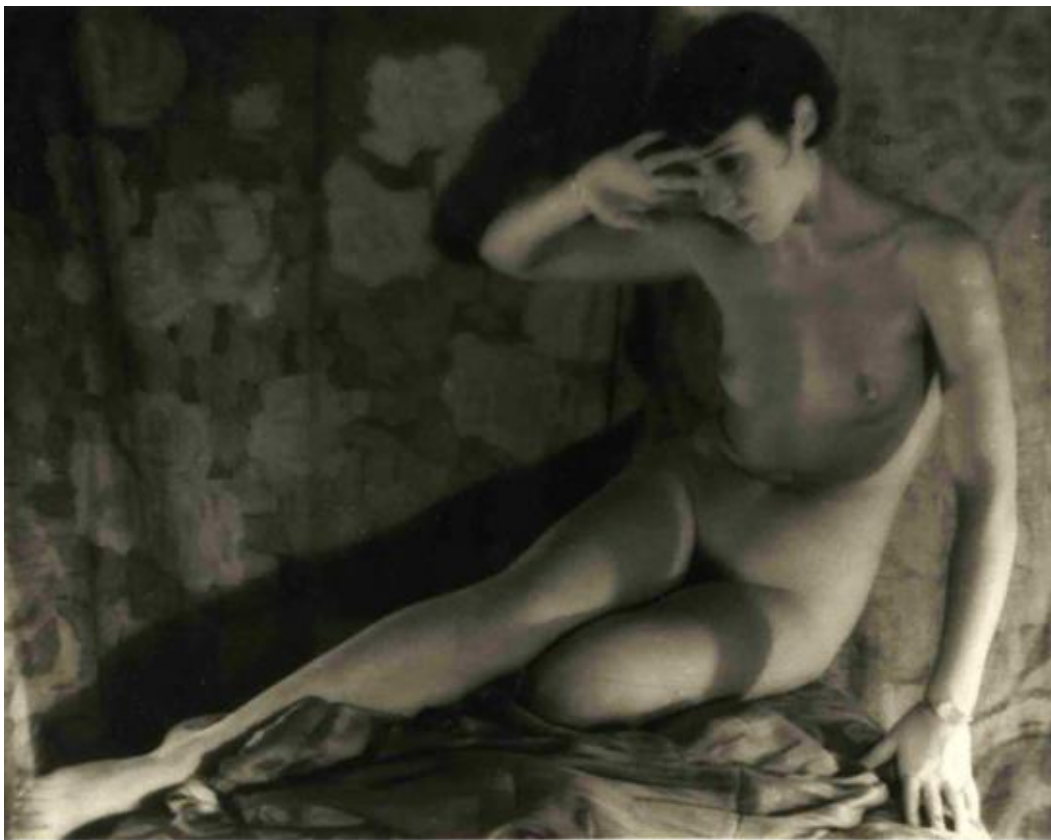






































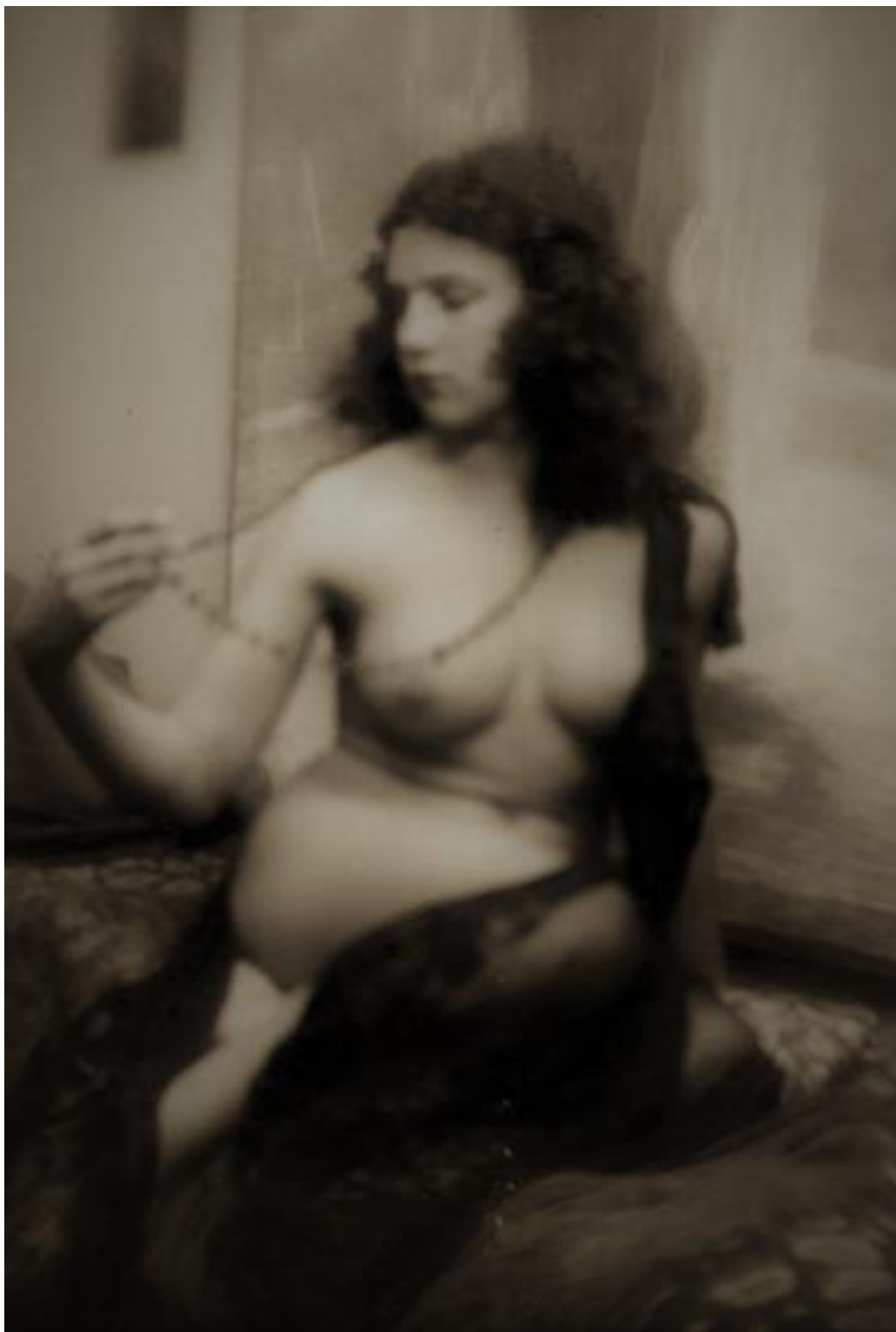
















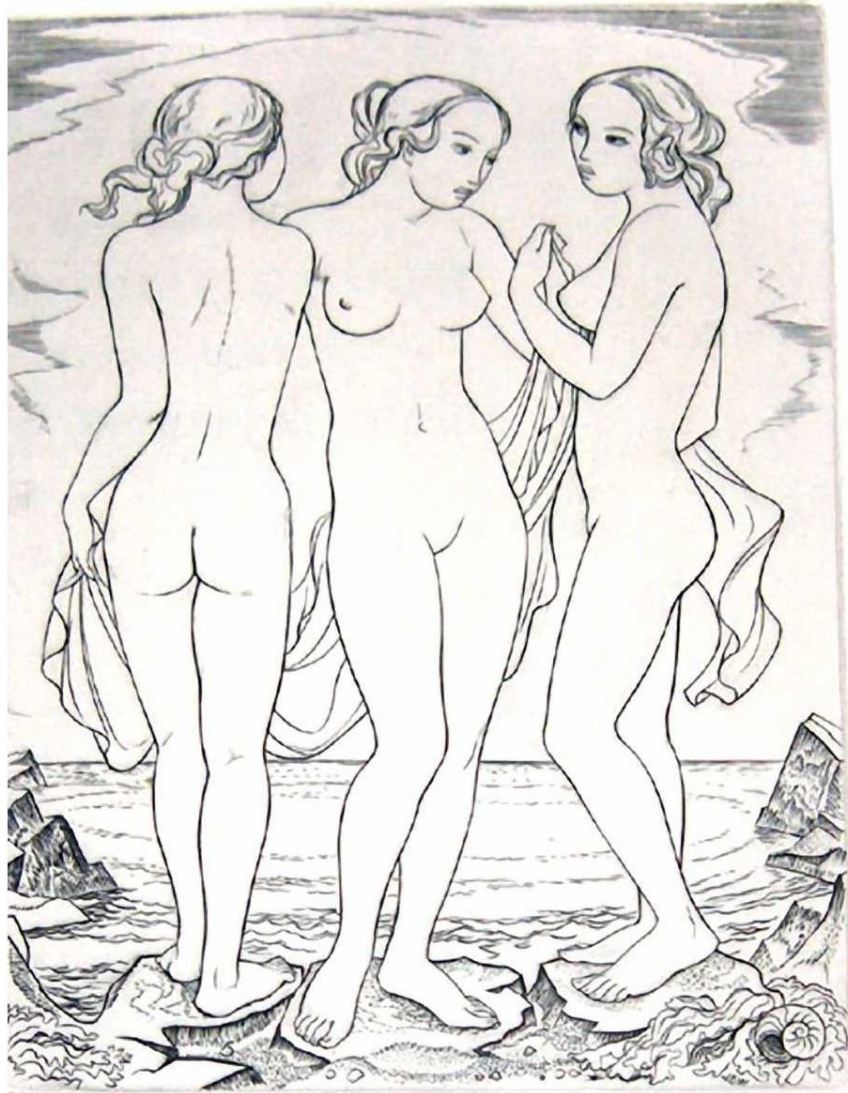












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